

COALITION OF CONNECTICUT SPORTSMEN

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Testimony presented to the public safety and security committee

IN OPPOSITION to S.B. No. 227 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING CECIL'S LAW.

by Robert T. Crook, Director

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The Coalition of CT sportsmen is opposed to SB 227 because, if implemented, it would amount to the taking of property that had been acquired legally and in good faith; it imposes unreasonable use of law enforcement resources to a non-public safety issue. And while it is doubtful that state/local will enforce, it will fall to DEEP ENCON officers, currently understaffed and overburdened; prohibitively diminishes businesses such as the many state taxidermists, antique dealers, and eliminates private collections containing ivory; Promotes state and federal court cases particularly concerning a taking; and reduces freedom of action by essentially prohibiting trophy hunting by CT residents in foreign countries.

This bill harms those who have no part in illegal activities; firearm owners, sportsmen, hunters, recreational shooters and gun collectors who have legally purchased or acquired firearms (as well as knives, jewelry, antiques and other items) that have incorporated animal products for decades. These include some of America's most historically-significant and collectible guns.

The Endangered Species Act, the Lacey Act, and the African Elephant Conservation Act are federal laws that already extensively restrict the importation, possession and trade of endangered and threatened species. In addition, Connecticut state laws already protect local wildlife and prohibit the possession of any animal product from another country where the wildlife is known to have been killed illegally. Even though advocates for S. 227 claim this legislation is needed to protect African species, the bills' prohibitions will not protect wildlife. Since the 1990s the African elephant population has grown and stabilized at approximately 420,000 - 650,000 throughout Africa. Similarly, the southern white rhino population is growing in South Africa. Since 1968, South Africa has permitted hunting of southern white rhino and data from the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group shows that since hunting began, the numbers of southern white rhino have increased from 1,800 to over 20,000.

"Hunting concessions are a vital component of Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) in Namibia, [and other African nations] the objective of which is 'to promote activities that demonstrate that sustainably managed natural resources can result in social development and economic growth, and in suitable partnership between local communities and government'.

This successful programme has resulted in a win-win situation for both humans earning a livelihood, and conservation and sustainability. It takes into account attracting tourists and hunting in a managed and sustainable way. All hunting resorts are under the strict supervision of the Directorate of Resource Management of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET)”

Banning the trade and sale of legally owned, pre-ban ivory will not save one elephant, and a prohibition on the importation, possession and transportation of future hunting trophies in Connecticut only strips valuable resources from African communities trying to protect the listed species.

Historically, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service maintained the position that most ivory in the U.S. has been legally imported and that its sale in the U.S. did not materially contribute to the illegal ivory trade. Under SB 227, the importation, possession, sale, offer to sell or transportation of these legal products would turn everyday citizens of Connecticut into felons.

The proposed vague “registration” scheme in SB 227 is, at best, an unworkable, impractical and legally indefensible attempt to sidestep the unconstitutional takings included in this bill. This effective taking of the heretofore legal private property of potentially tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of CT citizens is a clear violation of the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. It is also an offense to longstanding American rights, freedoms and values of fairness and equity. Ultimately the adverse impact on Connecticut citizens and residents will be in the millions of dollars and the state of Connecticut stands to lose millions of dollars more in lost commerce, taxes, and enforcement expense as well as in litigation expenses opposing this legally indefensible bill for no appreciable positive impact on the real problem, poaching and the illegal black market trade in threatened and endangered animals.

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In creating new law we should first ask, is there is a specific problem that needs fixing. Does Connecticut have a problem with illegal ivory trafficking, international legal hunting, or with taxidermy services within its borders? Humane Society of the United States, Recommends: “In order to ensure that the bill withstands **constitutional**

challenge, we strongly suggest adding an exception for “activity that is expressly authorized by federal law.” In addition, we recommend removing the prohibition on import.” What then, with these exceptions, is the intent of the proposal?

Does DEEP have the resources and expertise to inspect hundreds of thousands of pieces upon enactment?

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The Coalition of CT Sportsmen detest the poaching/illegal trade of endangered and threatened species support science-based wildlife conservation efforts, including managed hunting, that have proven successful in posting significant gains in the majority of endangered and threatened species populations over the past few decades. For example, while elephants and rhinos are threatened in some parts of Africa, where managed hunting has been allowed the populations have flourished. We unequivocally support practical and lawful efforts to defend endangered/threatened species as well as enforcement activities that directly target illegal black-market trade. SB 227 accomplishes none of these effective and proven objectives. While this bill would not directly prohibit hunts in Africa that are legal under international, federal and individual African country law, it would criminalize hunters returning to CT with legal trophies. Worse, it steals millions of dollars in value from thousands who have previously hunted and their heirs who possess trophies from a legal hunt and hundreds of thousands more CT citizens who own lawfully imported and purchased items produced from parts of these endangered and threatened animals and which were legally imported, typically decades ago.

We urge REJECTION of his bill.

Thank You.